

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USCINCEUR
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARIS 8414

EUR FOR AMBASSADOR RUSH

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION PARTIES

REFS: (A) PARIS 8239, (B) PARIS 8240

SUMMARY. WHILE THERE IS AT PRESENT A TENDENCY TO DRAMA-
TIZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN
THEIR IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH, ALL THE PARTIES ARE BEGINNING
TO TAKE STOCK AND WILL BE MEETING OVER THE NEXT TWO
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WEEKS TO DRAW LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE. THE PRIME MINISTER
WILL VERY LIKELY RESHUFFLE HIS CABINET WITHIN THIS
PERIOD; JACQUES CHIRAC, ONCE ELECTED MAYOR OF PARIS,
WILL NO DOUBT HAVE ANOTHER MEETING WITH GISCARD, ETC.
BUT LOOKING BEYOND THESE FORMALITIES WE SEE THE FOLLOW-
INF:

-- LITTLE REASON FOR THE UNITED LEFT TO CHANGE ITS WINNING STRATEGY; A CONTINUATION, DESPITE MANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PS AND PCF, OF THE UNION'S CONCENTRATION ON BREAD AND BUTTER ECONOMIC/SOCIAL QUESTION; EQUALLY IMPORTANT, WE LOOK FORWARD TO A CONTINUATION OF THE LEFT'S THEME THAT "EVERYTHING IS POLITICS";

-- MORE MOVEMENT WITHIN THE MAJORITY, BADLY SHAKEN BY THE MUNICIPALS. THERE ARE SEVERAL FORMS THIS COULD TAKE: (A) RALLYING WITHIN THE MAJORITY, WITH THE RPR TAKING THE LEAD IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE LEFT; (B) A RALLYING OF THE NON-GAULLISTS AROUND GISCARD/BARRE TO FORM A TWO-PRONGED ALLIANCE IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1978 LEGISLATIVES OR (C) CONTINUED RIVALRY BETWEEN THE VARIOUS FACTIONS LEADING TO THE SAME KIND OF PRIMARIES IN 1978 WHICH SO BADLY HURT THE MAJORITY IN LAST WEEK'S ELECTIONS. ALL MAJORITY VOICES CALL FOR UNITY, BUT THIS WILL BE MUCH EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

AT THE SAME TIME THE LEFT CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED -- ITS 52 PERCENT SCORE LEAVES NO FAT TO BE TRIMMED IF IT EXPECTS TO WIN IN 1978. END SUMMARY.

1. SOME LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE MUNICIPALS:

-- THE FRENCH ELECTORATE IS NO LONGER FRIGHTENED OFF BY SCARE CAMPAIGNS ABOUT COMMUNISTS ACCEDING TO ELECTED POSITIONS. THIS CONCLUSION HAS TO BE TEMPERED BY THE FACT THAT MUNICIPAL LISTS WITH A PC MEMBER AT ITS HEAD ALMOST ALWAYS CONTAINED A CERTAIN BALANCE WITH A GOOD NUMBER OF SOCIALISTS. STILL, IN 72 LARGE CONFIDENTIAL

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CITIES, MANY IN TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE REGIONS, THE ELECTORATE CHOSE TO IGNORE WARNINGS THAT THE LEFT WOULD BRING WITH IT BUREAUCRACY, COLLECTIVISM AND HIGH TAXES.

-- THE PCF, PS AND MRG (IN DESCENDING RANK ORDER) ELECTORATES SHOWED GOOD COHESION IN VOTING FOR THE LEFT LIST WHICH CAME IN AHEAD IN THE FIRST ROUND. GIVEN THE HISTORICALLY BITTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PS AND PCF IN MANY REGIONS AND THE HARD BARGAINING BETWEEN THEM IN NEGOTIATING JOINT LISTS, THIS RESULT IS NO MEAN FEAT.

-- VOTER SUPPORT AMONG THE MAJORITY PARTIES WAS, WITH SOME NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, BETTER THAN EXPECTED, GIVEN THE BAD BLOOD SPILLED BETWEEN IR/CENTRIST AND RPR CANDIDATES DURING THE CAMPAIGN IN PARIS AND IN THE PROVINCES. THUS, MUCH AS POLITICAL CIRCLES MAY TALK ABOUT THE DISARRAY WITHIN THE MAJORITY, A MAJOR PART OF ITS ELECTORATE CUT IT SHORT TO VOTE AGAINST THE LEFT.

-- THE ANCIENT DIVISION BETWEEN PARIS AND THE

REST OF THE COUNTRY STILL EXISTS, BUT NOW TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE LATTER. A GREAT DEAL OF THE MEDIA ATTENTION, ESPECIALLY FOREIGN, CONCENTRATED ON THE PARIS RACE, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT CHIRAC'S VICTORY WAS THE START OF SOMETHING. WHAT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND IS THAT PARIS IS UNREPRESENTATIVE OF THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF FRANCE TODAY. ITS MAINLY BOURGEOIS POPULATION HAS FOR DECADES RETURNED CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLORS TO OFFICE, BUT MORE INDICATIVE OF GENERAL TRENDS ARE THE RESULTS IN THE FOUR OTHER LARGEST CITIES WHICH VOTE BY SECTORS. THE MAJORITY LOST TWO SECTORS IN LYON, THUS SENDING LEFT CANDIDATES TO THE COUNCIL FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1965; IT LOST THE ONLY SECTOR IT HELD IN MARSEILLE; AND IN NICE AND TOULOUSE, THE IR CANDIDATES BARELY SQUEAKED BY.

2. IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES:

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-- INCREASED RESPECTABILITY FOR THE LEFT, INCLUDING THE PCF. HARDLY A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT SOME LEFT MAYOR APPEARING IN THE MEDIA, ESPECIALLY THE TELEVISION, CONVEYING THE IMPRESSION OF THE DEDICATED MANAGER OF HIS CITY. THE LEFT NOW HAS A YEAR TO CONFIRM THIS IMAGE.

-- INCREASED LEFT REPRESENTATION IN THE SENATE AND REGIONAL COUNCILS. THE SENATE IS ELECTED INDIRECTLY BY "NOTABLES", INCLUDING MAYORS AND GENERAL COUNCILLORS, WITH ONE-THIRD OF THE SENATE COMING UP FOR REELECTION IN SEPTEMBER. WHILE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE SENATE NEVERTHELESS HAS A ROLE IN PASSING LEGISLATION. LEFT GAINS IN LAST YEAR'S CANTONAL ELECTIONS WILL ACCENTUATE THIS SECONDARY EFFECT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARIS 8414

EUR FOR AMBASSADOR RUSH

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

-- ADDITIONAL SPRING BOARDS FOR THE LEFT IN THE
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE FOR
BECOMING A DEPUTY IS FIRST WINNING A SEAT IN THE GENERAL
COUNCIL AND THEN A CITY HALL. ONCE WELL ESTABLISHED IN
HIS CANTON AND CITY AND WITH THE ELECTORAL LOGISTICS
BEHIND HIM, THE MAYOR IS IN AN IDEAL POSITION TO RUN
FOR PARLIAMENT.

-- THE CENTER CONTINUES TO BE NIBBLED AT, PARTI-
CULARLY BY THE LEFT. NOT A GREAT FORCE FOR THE LAST 20
YEARS, IT NEVERTHELESS PROVIDED THE NECESSARY MARGIN
AND BALANCE GISCARD NEEDED SINCE 1974. WITH ITS LOSSES
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IN THE MUNICIPALS GO, TO SOME EXTENT, THE PRESIDENT'S
HOPES FOR A CENTER-LEFT OPENING (IF INDEED HE STILL
ENTERTAINED THEM).

-- FINALLY, BARRE'S IMAGE HAS NOT BENEFITTED
DURING THE MUNICIPALS. ENTERING THE CAMPAIGN BELATEDLY
WITH A BLAND PLEA FOR MAJORITY SUPPORT, HE IS
NOW INEVITABLY SHARING IN SOME OF THE BLAME BECAUSE OF
HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE PRESIDENT.

3. MID-TERM CONSEQUENCES

(A) THE LEFT WILL NOT BE IN A MOOD TO TAKE ANY
CHANCES. IT HAS WON MORE CITIES THAN IT EXPECTED, AND
ITS EXPECTATIONS WERE ALREADY QUITE HIGH. IT WILL
CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION IN THE CITIES AND REGIONS IT
HAS CAPTURED, WHILE CONTINUING ITS MISSIONARY WORK WHERE

THE MAJORITY IS STILL IN CONTROL. ITS LEADERS HAVE BEEN A MODEL OF RESPONSIBILITY SINCE THE MARCH 20 RESULTS BECAME KNOWN, AVOIDING ANY TRIUMPHALISM AND TENDING (EVEN MARCHAIS) TOWARD THE UNDERSTATEMENT. MITTERRAND, MARCHAIS AND FABRE, IN THEIR OWN WAYS, WILL PROBABLY KEEP HITTING THE SAME ISSUES WHICH HAVE PAID OFF SO WELL UP TO NOW: UNEMPLOYMENT, THE FRANC, DISADVANTAGED SOCIAL GROUPS, EXPLOITATION OF THE WORKERS, MONOPOLY BUSINESS, PUBLIC SCANDALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT. BY PLAYING DOWN THE IDEOLOGICAL DEBATE, THEY WILL TRY TO MINIMIZE THE EFFECT OF CHIRAC'S MAIN ARGUMENT OF "COLLECTIVISM". BUT WHEN FACED WITH THE ARGUMENT -- AS WAS MICHEL ROCARD FOR ONE HOUR ON ELECTION NIGHT -- THEY WILL MEET IT HEAD ON AND ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE MORE DIFFICULT PASSAGES OF THE COMMON PROGRAM TO THE PUBLIC. FOREIGN POLICY WILL TAKE A BACK SEAT -- AS IT USUALLY DOES DURING FRENCH ELECTION CAMPAIGNS -- EXCEPT DURING THE ASSEMBLY DEBATE THIS SPRING ON THE EC PARLIAMENT AND A FEW OTHER DELICATE ISSUES. MITTERRAND'S DEBATE WITH PRIME MINISTER BARRE ON MAY 12 WILL, FOR INSTANCE, BE DEVOTED TO THE FRANCH ECONOMY.

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(B) THE MAJORITY, BEING THE PRESENT UNDERDOG, WILL BE FORCED TO BE MORE IMAGINATIVE IF IT HOPES TO REGAIN LOST GROUND BEFORE 1978. WHILE IT IS TOO EARLY TO SENSE WHICH WAY THE WINDS ARE BLOWING (THE RESPECTIVE PARTIES WILL BE MEETING IN STRATEGY SESSIONS OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS), THERE ARE ALREADY A FEW SIGNS OF THINGS TO COME(I) JACQUES CHIRAC HINTED IN THE LOSING DAYS OF HIS CAMPAIGN THAT HE WAS BACKTRACKING FROM HIS PREVIOUS SUPPORT FOR THE EC PARLIAMENT -- AT LEAST UNLESS CERTAIN CONDITIONS WERE FULFILLED. HOWEVER, RPR INSIDERS ASSURE US THE PARTY WILL NOT GO TO THE WALL ON THIS ISSUE. (II) HIS SECRETARY GENERAL JEROME MONOD AND OTHER AIDES ARE PULLING OUT THE WHOLE PANOPLY OF SHIBBOLETHS WHICH WORKED SO POORLY DURING THE MUNICIPAL CAMPAIGN: COLLECTIVISM, STALINISM, NATIONALIZATION OF BANKING AND CREDIT, LIBERTIES, ETC. (III) CENTRIST AND IR LEADERS ARE LOOKING TO GISCARD TO PROVIDE THE DIRECTION OF THE MAJORITY'S EFFORTS FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, WHILE RPR SPOKESMEN POINT TO THE PARIS RESULTS IN MAINTAINING THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO STOP THE LEFT: TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE, MEET IT HEAD ON, AND THIS OF COURSE BEHIND JACQUES CHIRAC.

4. ALTERNATIVES FOR GISCARD: GISCARD'S OPTIONS SEEM LIMITED TO MAKING THE BARRE PLAN WORK AND WORKING OUT SOME AS YET UNDEFINED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FUTURE MAYOR OF PARIS. OTHER GIMICKS ARE AVAILA-

BLE BUT NOT LIKELY. A BILL TO REINTRODUCE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD BE TAKEN AS A DECLARATION OF WAR BY THE RPR -- AND PERHAPS NOT EVEN SUPPORTED BY THE PS, DESPITE THE LANGUAGE OF COMMON PROGRAM. WIN OR LOSE, SUCH A PROPOSITION WOULD MOST LIKELY PRECIPITATE EARLY ELECTIONS AND THE END OF THE BARRE GOVERNMENT. NEITHER, FOR MANY REASONS, WOULD EARLY ELECTIONS BE AN INTELLIGENT TACTIC -- GISCARD WOULD STAND AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF LOSING THEM AND HE WOULD LOSE HIS RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIAL

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DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT FOR ONE YEAR THEREAFTER.

5. GISCARD WILL THEREFORE PROBABLY STICK TO A LESS DRAMATIC STYLE OF GOVERNING, AS HE HAS IN THE PAST. THIS WOULD INCLUDE PRESS CONFERENCES (THE NEXT ONE, CONSECRATED TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WILL BE ON MARCH 30) IN WHICH HE PERFORMS SO WELL, OTHER PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS AND AN ENERGETIC PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAM (THE SESSION BEGINS APRIL 2) INCLUDING BILLS ON THE EC PARLIAMENT, CORPORATE REFORM, FISCAL REFORM, ADDITIONAL AID TO CERTAIN GROUPS, ETC. HE IS ALSO EXPECTED TO RESHUFFLE HIS CABINET TO REFLECT THE ELECTION LOSSES BY SEVEN OF HIS MINISTERS. ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, GISCARD PLANS TO ALLOW "PARACHUTE" CANDIDATES, WHO HAPPEN TO BE IR/CENTRISTS, TO STAY IN RETURN FOR THEIR ELECTORAL BRAVERY, WHILE THOSE MINISTERS WHO LOST IN THEIR HOME DISTRICTS, COINCIDENTALLY RPR MEMBERS FOR THE MOST PART, WOULD BE FORCED OUT. BUT ALL THIS IS RATHER WEAK MEDICINE FOR TURNING THE ELECTORAL TIDE IN THE RELATIVELY SHORT PERIOD OF ONE YEAR. THERE WILL BE NO EASY OR CONVENIENT ANSWERS TO HIS DILEMMA, WHICH IS NOT JUST ONE OF PERSONALITIES BUT ONE OF WINNING BACK TO THE MAJORITY DISTRICTS ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY WHICH ARE TURNING LEFT. BUT A FIRST NECESSARY STEP IN ACHIEVING THIS GOAL WILL CERTAINLY BE FORMING A MORE COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE MAJORITY, AND THEREFORE ARRIVING AT AN UNDERSTANDING WITH CHIRAC, THOUGH SUCH AN EVENTUALITY SEEMS REMOTE AT PRESENT. MORE THAN IN RECENT CAMPAIGNS, INTERNAL UNITY WITHIN THE TWO MAIN POLITICAL BLOCS WILL DETERMINE THE OUTCOME AS MUCH AS THEIR RESPECTIVE POLICY PLATFORMS. AT PRESENT, THE LEFT IS WINNING ON THIS SCORE AS HANDILY AS IT DID IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

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